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TRAINING FOR EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVICE

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Those who have had occasion to follow the trend of opinion among university authorities of this country are well aware that the matter of training for public service is receiving some of the serious consideration which it deserves.¹ Even the great war in Europe, which overshadows everything else, has served to increase rather than diminish the interest in this subject, for it is patent to all thoughtful observers that the supreme public question of the hour is whether democracy and efficiency are inherently irreconcilable.² Everywhere, serious students of government are asking themselves whether it is possible to have thorough-going democratic control over the government and at the same time secure the efficient fulfillment of the great tasks which modern social and industrial conditions have imposed upon the state.

The Reconciliation of Liberty and Efficiency

On viewing the remarkable achievements of Germany in the land campaigns, even the most grudging cannot withhold their admiration for the effectiveness and scientific precision with which her gigantic military enterprises are carried out. There is no doubt that the wonderful showing made by that country has been due to something more than the valor and skill of the soldiers on the battle field. The military authorities would have been impotent if it had not been for the masterful way in which the civil administration of the country has been conducted. If Germany had back of the firing line the kind of civil government which the United States had during the Spanish war—with its scandals of “embalmed” beef and inadequate supplies—administrative imbecility would have wrought more terrible havoc among her own men than all the high-power explosives which the Allies have mustered.

¹ *School and Society* for December 25, 1915, p. 905.

² See President Eliot's address before the National Civil Service Reform League, “Can the Civil Service of a Democracy be Made Efficient,” printed in *Good Government* for January, 1916.

It is a matter of common knowledge, of course, that the administration of Germany is not democratic in the American sense; that is, the public officers are not elected for short terms by popular vote and compelled to keep their attention fixed upon pleasing the public at every turn. It is not often that a ward politician in a German city can walk into the police commissioner's office and tell the commissioner to "let up" on his district, or appear before the judge of a police court and get a constituent off on the ground that he is "a good fellow." The city of New York has had thirteen police commissioners in fifteen years; the city of Berlin has had less than half that many in a century.

On contrasting the administrative conditions in the two countries, publicists of pessimistic temper are inclined to hold that efficiency and close popular control are incompatible; that only when we have autocratic power above can work be done well by the rank and file. Therefore, those who put efficiency above all forms of government advise us to surrender any cherished notions which we may entertain about liberty in order that the nation's work may be done with mechanical precision.

Such advisers, however, overlook other possible expedients. Nations as well as individuals may justly ask themselves whether it is not better to perish nobly for the sake of things that are worth while than to live miserably in mechanical bondage for the mere sake of living. But it is not necessary for us to choose between bureaucracy and suicide. It is rather for us to attempt seriously the reconciliation of strong and efficient government with democratic control.

It is false to say that the experiment has been made and has failed. The truth is the experiment has not been attempted. On the contrary, we are really in the preliminary stages of thinking about it.

Although to some the larger issues of statecraft here presented may seem somewhat remote from the question immediately before us—training for public service—in my opinion they are fundamental to any solution of the problems which such training involves. It is a waste of time for us to lay out perfect plans based upon the experience of Europe, if it is impossible to secure their adoption by American democracy, or if they mean the loss of some of our cherished political principles.

Democracy and the Expert

There can be no doubt that democracy distrusts the expert and there is no doubt also that much of this mistrust is well grounded and thoroughly justified. This is due partly to the air of unwarranted superiority which the expert too frequently assumes and partly to the fact that history presents a long record of self-constituted experts who have been discredited. The Stuart kings resisted the interference of the middle class in affairs of state on the ground that such matters were "mysteries"—this is the very word they used—to be mastered only by experts. In earlier times there was an expert class in theology that proposed to do the thinking for the human race in matters religious. There have been military castes, self-confessed experts who have succeeded more than once in imposing not only their professional but their class interests upon the civil population.

The theory upon which aristocracies have been defended is the theory of experts—of a class especially endowed and set apart for political government. The world's judgment on experts in state craft, in priest craft, and in military craft is so plain that he who runs may read. What the raw French levies, sometimes led by sons of butchers, bakers and candlestick makers, did to the "expert" generals of the old régime is well known to those who are familiar with the campaigns that followed the outbreak of the Revolutionary wars in 1793.

It is not mere ignorance, therefore, that leads democracy to suspect and distrust the person who sets himself up to tell it exactly how to do things. The only kind of an expert that democracy will and ought to tolerate is the expert who admits his fallibility, retains an open mind and is prepared to serve. There are many things in this world worse than very dirty streets, a very high death rate and a large percentage of crime. Anyone who is so overcome by passion for efficiency and expertness that he is willing to sacrifice everything else for the sake of securing any kind of mere mechanical excellence has no message for democracy in America.

Nevertheless, when the last word of criticism is uttered against the short-comings of the expert, it is not to be doubted that democracy also has much to learn; and the first thing is the fundamental principle set forth by Professor Goodnow in his work on *Politics*

and Administration many years ago, namely, that expert, scientific and technical service must be performed by those specially trained and not by those who are charged with responsibility for the determination of public policies.

Unquestionably, we are making great strides in this direction.³ As Mr. M. L. Cooke, Director of Public Works of Philadelphia, said not long ago, we are really beginning to recognize that "a high bacterial count in a city's water supply remains a problem incapable of solution to the political office holder, even though he can carry every precinct in his ward." There is scarcely a session of a legislature in which an effort is not made to secure some contribution toward the improvement of the civil service.

The Negative Aspects of Civil Service Reform

In spite, however, of great gains that have been made toward such improvement, much remains to be done in creating new methods of recruiting for public employment, increasing the skill and loyalty of the personnel and retaining those of tested worth. The negative work of the civil service reformers in abolishing the grosser features of the spoils system has been fairly well done, but that is only a part of the task.

It is apparent to those who read the literature of civil service reform that the ideas of public policy expressed therein are frequently too restricted in character. One has only to examine the speeches made in the name of civil service reform and the reports of civil service commissions throughout the country to discover how inadequate, in many quarters, is the current conception concerning the function of a recruiting agency in modern government. We must develop more convincing ideas of constructive civil service reform as we ask democracy to put more faith in the doctrine.

"Keeping the rascals out," though undoubtedly important, is really not so important that one should be entirely satisfied with such an enterprise, when one considers the graver problem of how to get well-trained people into the service, keep them there after they enter, and train them for ever increasingly effective work in the service. It would be wrong, of course, to criticize all civil service reformers, for it would be possible to name here many leaders in that movement who have the widest possible outlook

³ See *Good Government* for January, 1916.

upon modern questions of government service. But granting that excellent motives prevail and have prevailed and that excellent work has been done, we must say emphatically the time has arrived for giving more attention to lifting up the strong and wise than to holding down the wicked.

If one turns from the work of citizens' agencies concerned with civil service reform to the publications of the civil service commissions and authorities in the United States, one is not surprised to find that, generally speaking, these also reveal the existence of the negative notions of a generation ago. There is in this no criticism of public officers. Their duty is to execute the law, and the law reflects the thought of the citizens. The condition in the official civil service is quite well expressed in an order issued by President Taft on December 23, 1910, to the effect that "No officer or employee of the government shall directly or indirectly instruct or be concerned in any manner in the instruction of any person or classes of persons with a view to their special preparation for the examination of the board of examiners for consular and diplomatic services." Another example is afforded by the federal bulletin concerning the consular service in which it is announced that the government does not maintain a school for training the candidates for the foreign service, does not recommend any particular institution, does not suggest a list of books to be studied, and cannot furnish a course of study for any school.

No doubt the evils of favoritism against which these orders are directed are apparent enough. No objection can be urged against the government's desire to obviate those evils, but the solution of the problem is none the less ridiculous. Ridiculous is the precise word to employ. What our governments, federal, state and municipal, in effect say to young men and women looking forward to entering the public service is this:

We have no treatises which will give you accurate and adequate information about the matters with which you should be familiar. We will not allow you to get any instruction from anybody who is actually doing the work for which you want to prepare yourself. We will not give you any advice about how to prepare yourself. Although we spend millions on education in the United States, we cannot spend one dollar in preparing you to serve your country in a civil position. All we can do is to give you a list of sample questions which have been asked sometime in the past and may never be asked again. You must get your instruction and information in some haphazard, unsystematic, trust-to-luck scheme, which may by the skin of your teeth pull you through an examination.

Such a conception of the public service, which is undoubtedly the conception of the people at large, the politicians and even a few statesmen, would be truly comical if it were not fraught with such consequences to democracy.

It violates every canon of reason and every principle derived from sound experience in the efficient management of private enterprises. Imagine, for instance, a great railroad corporation or manufacturing concern conducting its employment agency on any such plans. Imagine an employing officer in a large corporation saying to an applicant:

We cannot admit you to our factory in order that you may see the nature of the work for which you are to prepare yourself. We cannot allow any employee of this factory to give you any instructions about what you are to do. We cannot give you anything but a list of questions which we asked someone two or three years ago. We cannot tell you where to go to get any information about how we do business. The thing for you to do is to go out and walk up and down the streets until you find a sign bearing these mystic words—"people crammed for any job on short order." Spend a few hours there and then trust to the benign Providence who watches over you to slip you past a long list of questions which a few examiners on the tenth floor of our building have prepared for novitiates.

If the private business of this country were conducted on any such program we should be back in the stage-coach days of civilization.

This is not, however, any criticism of those charged with the administration of our civil service laws—it is simply a description of the current American notions regarding the right way to recruit the public service.

Not until we have accepted the principle established in private business experience, that persons will not be regularly admitted to employment until they have demonstrated that they can *do* the work which is required of them, can we build our recruiting systems upon a solid foundation. This means that our civil service commissions should become less and less examining bodies and more and more training bodies. Unless we can endure this thought we might as well give up all notion of reconciling democracy and efficiency.

UNIVERSITIES AND TRAINING FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

While this notion is slowly taking hold of the public mind, those of us who are connected with educational institutions must be willing

to take stock of our own ideas and pre-conceptions and subject them to searching scrutiny. Certainly, we shall be doing the public service a lasting injury if we attempt to make it more academic in character. While not for a moment deprecating the value of mere book learning, while stoutly contending that democracy has too little respect for the wisdom which is founded on the recorded experience of the human race, we must not ignore the fact that *doing* and *knowing* are different things. We must acknowledge the educational value that inheres in *doing* things and add this art to the seven liberal arts so long cherished. Why, for example, should we give a student academic credit for writing a thesis based on the reports of probation officers and deny him credit for doing the work of a probation officer? This is in effect saying—"If you know how somebody else did a thing you are entitled to a degree, but if you can only do it yourself you are a barbarian."

Academic Credit for Practical Work Is Necessary

There is a practical aspect of this problem also. Life is short and our educational program is already too long. We cannot ask very many students to spend four years in a high school, three or four years in college, three years in a law, medical, or engineering school and then devote a year or two to unpaid and unrecognized field and laboratory work preparatory to entering the public service. The exigencies of time compel us to combine doing with learning and that which necessity dictates is endorsed by experience in sound methods of instruction. To speak more concretely, those of us in the universities and colleges who propose to help the public service by training students for it must be willing to count toward the academic degree a reasonable amount of work done in departments of government or in business enterprises of kindred character.

From an academic point of view this is undoubtedly a serious matter. It is already difficult enough to maintain high academic standards, and cautious teachers are justly afraid of lowering that which is already too low. This educational work of "doing" must be properly organized; it must be so laid out that it can be properly evaluated. Methods for recording time spent and results accomplished must be devised and adequate supervision and

control must be guaranteed.⁴ When this is done there is no doubt that our institutions of learning will be glad to coöperate in the truly great work of training for the public service.

This function of organizing what may be termed the laboratory work in public service is, properly speaking, a public function. It should be undertaken by the municipality and the state and the federal government and by educational institutions, especially those supported by public funds. If this is not done, charges of favoritism may arise, which will disarrange the best laid plans. That it can be done by public institutions is demonstrated by the work of the College of the City of New York in organizing certain field courses in connection with several of the important departments of the city.⁵ That it can be done informally by private institutions also is demonstrated by the four years experience of the Training School for Public Service connected with the Bureau of Municipal Research in New York.

Academic Training for Public Service

When public opinion is prepared for a trained service, and when the practical laboratory work for training is organized and duly accredited, the problem will be by no means solved for the universi-

⁴ The following methods are used in the Training School for Public Service to control the so-called laboratory work of the students:

1. The work of the student is carefully planned and given to him in the form of assignments;

2. Each assignment is for a definite period of time and is an order to perform a definite task, either in research or in some department of the city government;

3. As far as possible merely clerical work is avoided, although there are few tasks which do not call for a large amount of clerical drudgery;

4. Each task to which a student is assigned is a part of a study or installation undertaken by the Bureau of Municipal Research;

5. A record of all assignments in detail is kept on file;

6. Each student is under the direction and control of a staff officer of the Bureau and the supervisor of the Training School;

7. Written reports on the progress in the assignment are required every two weeks and are graded and kept on file;

8. Special reports on set topics are required periodically, graded and kept on file;

9. Each student is required to turn in a daily record card showing the number of hours devoted to his work;

10. Periodical, oral statements of work done are required.

⁵ See *Training for Municipal Service* published by the Bureau of Municipal Research, New York City. Price 50 cents.

ties. It will be necessary of course to give a substantial academic foundation for the laboratory work, in the form of organized instruction. This is no simple matter. Training for public service is unlike training for law or medicine. It is relatively easy to lay out the field of jurisprudence and to say that a student must have a certain amount of criminal law and civil law—so many courses on real property, contracts, etc.

The public service on the other hand is extraordinarily varied. In the municipal service of New York City there are no less than 371 distinct titles, and our state and federal services are scarcely less differentiated in character. A few titles selected at random from the general service will indicate how complex is the problem. Public service in this country calls for consular and diplomatic officers of various grades and titles, electrical, mechanical, civil and chemical engineers, physicians, pathologists, bacteriologists, physiologists, geologists, topographers, veterinarians, oculists, nurses, teachers, lawyers, statisticians, chaplains, accountants, inspectors of many varieties, sanitary officers, draftmen, librarians, dock masters, social investigators, to say nothing of the minor positions.

From the point of view of training for public service, these various positions may be divided into certain broad groups. Professor H. G. James has classified the foundational courses in the University of Texas as follows: legal, sanitary, financial, educational, engineering, and public safety, including in the last, police, fire, charities and corrections.

While in a way this broad classification is exhaustive, it is apparent on closer examination that great variation in detail must be worked out within each group; for example, engineering work in a municipality is highly diversified and specialized. Ordinarily, a man trained in mechanical engineering is not prepared to undertake the functions of a civil engineer, and a civil engineer does not have the training in chemistry which fits him to test materials purchased by a city.

It is not necessary to go into further detail to show that the university which undertakes a comprehensive program of training for public service cannot merely lay out a few curricula and announce to the world that it is graduating specialists in one of five or six particular sciences, when as a matter of fact the actual public

service calls for from two or three hundred varieties of technical specialties. While there may be certain underlying courses necessary to all branches of the service, still any institution that prepares for the service in general must be ready to give great flexibility and variation to the programs of its students. The enterprise, in short, calls for the coöperation of a large number of specialists in almost every branch of human knowledge.

The New Science of Administration

In addition to the technical specialties there is slowly being evolved also a new field of public service for which a somewhat homogeneous curriculum can be worked out. I refer to the field of public administration. Those who have watched the course of development in our engineering schools know very well that the higher grade institutions are tending away from the old technical instruction which savored of manual training, toward what is called efficiency engineering, or management. To speak concretely, the type of mechanical engineer for whom the world has the most need today is not the man who can simply run a lathe or put together the parts of a power plant, but the man who can organize and supervise hundreds and even thousands of men who are running lathes, drawing designs, and assembling plants.

Students of government who follow this trend are at last becoming aware of the existence of a science of public administration distinct from any technical specialty such as law or engineering. They are beginning to realize that the science of administration devised by the lawyers—the bare description of legal structures, powers and duties—is largely a science of administrative nihilism, whose function, all too frequently, is to render the government impotent and contemptible in the defense of private rights. This legal science is no science of management at all, but at very best the starting point for any genuine science of administration.

Inchoate though this new science of administration may be, it is none the less very real. A great deal of the literature already exists in scattered form, and many courses of instruction bearing upon the subject are already given in various schools in our universities. The immediate problem is to coördinate these courses and to supplement them by new programs of instruction, so as to create a curriculum of public administration which, when superimposed upon law, engineering, accounting, medicine, a college education

or business experience, will help to prepare students for responsible positions which do not call for technical and scientific performance, but for the organization, supervision and investigation of technical and scientific work. Such a program should consist, in part at least, of the following elements:

1. Administrative law;
2. Taxation, finance and budget-making;
3. Scientific management;
4. Public works management;
5. Methods of recruiting and maintaining an efficient personnel;
6. City planning;
7. Problems of departmental organization;
8. Preparation of reports;
9. Statistics and graphic presentation.

The Direction of University Training for Public Service

It must be understood, however, that this new administrative science must be built upon solid foundations and that it can be taken with success only by a select few of high grade students. The main work in training for public service will still be highly specialized and cannot be conducted by a single school of a university. It should be managed by a committee under a responsible director thoroughly acquainted with the requirements of the public service and closely in touch with the methods of examination and appointment. Such a director should have in his advisory committee representatives of the several schools of the university, who are competent to give advice as to the right training for the various positions in the public service thrown open from time to time. Such a general centralization of supervision was suggested in the *Report of the Committee on Training for Public Service* of Columbia University, published on March 27, 1915, from which the following recommendations are taken:

1. That a university standing committee on training for public service be established, the said committee to be composed of a chairman, and four additional members from the School of Mines, of Engineering and of Chemistry, the Faculty of Political Science, the School of Architecture, and Teachers College;
2. That it shall be the duty of the standing committee to continue the study of the problem of training for public service and present from time to time to the appropriate authorities recommendations relative to the organization of new courses, the adaptation of courses already offered, and such other matters as may be calculated to increase the efficiency of the university's work in training for official and unofficial public service;
3. That it shall be the duty of the chairman of the committee, in coöperation

with the present committee on appointments, to keep a record of all positions, federal, state and municipal, which may be attractive to college students, and the subjects and dates of approaching examinations, and to be prepared to advise students contemplating entering the public service as to the courses and methods to be pursued in preparation for such positions. It shall be the duty of the chairman to confer with civil service commissioners and chief examiners as to the relation between university instruction and civil service examinations, standards, and eligibility. The chairman shall also study the whole field of unofficial public service and be prepared to advise students desiring to enter that service;

4. That the announcements of the several divisions of the university shall contain a statement of the scope and work of the committee on training for public service in order that students may be encouraged to confer with the chairman as to courses of study leading to public service and the methods of entering such service.

Reconstruction of Civil Service Commission Reports

Finally, attention should be called to the fact that the work of colleges and universities in training for public service would be greatly facilitated if civil service commissions would prepare reports directed to those seeking admission to the public service as well as to the general public. Such reports should contain information on the following points:

1. The various types of positions in the public service classified according to function;
2. The number of positions in each functional class, the average number of appointments during the past few years, as a basis to estimate probable demand in the future;
3. The special training, qualifications and experience required for admission to the various classes;
4. Lines of promotion within classes and groups;
5. Promotions in the several classes and groups for the past few years, as a basis for measuring probable opportunities;
6. Brief statement of the training and qualifications of persons recently admitted to the several groups and classes, designed to inform probable applicants as to the character of persons actually admitted to the service.

With public opinion properly educated to appreciate a trained service, with our civil service commissions transformed into general recruiting and training bodies, with field and laboratory experience in public service well organized and recognized by institutions of learning as counting toward their degrees, with the new science of administration now in the process of making thoroughly constructed, with directors of public service training in all our large institutions of learning, we could look forward confidently to the solution of the problem presented at the opening of the paper, namely, the reconciliation of democracy and efficiency.